

A sense of belonging

Community spaces building family strengths



Children and Families Everywhere (CAFE) is an initiative of the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services, Child and Youth Health and the Federal Department of Family and Community Services. Designed to be an integrated services model - bringing health, education and the community together - it aims to create a 'family friendly centre' that meets the needs of local children and their families.

Based on site at the Enfield Primary School in the northern suburbs of Adelaide, CAFE has been running for eighteen months now and has established a strong community spirit. Parents have created a space of their own which has become the heart of the project, where service providers and families work together.

Children and Families Everywhere (CAFE) has a core group of volunteer parents, who work alongside CAFE staff, local service providers, as well as workers from Child and Youth Health and the Department of Education and Children's Services. This core volunteer group has participated in a range of activities including training (to support the wider community), planning and implementing community activities, assisting in setting up a community space, and helping in the crèche.

Over the past six months the project has engaged over 340 parents and 280 children through a range of early childhood and parenting programs, activities for communities, children's activities, parent volunteer participation and community consultations. CAFE Enfield prides itself on the commitment to building 'family strengths'. Families are involved in all aspects of the centre including decision-making and management groups. This helps to ensure that activities are in response to community need.

CAFE Enfield has become a community hub with high numbers of families involved in activities or just 'dropping-in' daily. The warm, friendly and engaging environment that

has been facilitated at CAFE Enfield has not only created learning opportunities for both children and parents, but increased community strengths and relationships that go beyond the centre itself and reach out to the streets and homes of local families.

At *Children and Families Everywhere* (CAFE), activities will often be initiated by parents, rather than service providers. Service providers will then work together to respond to their needs. This encourages parent involvement and ownership and increases word of mouth referrals. It has also meant service providers have had to be creative when working together, looking at their core business whilst responding to the local community need.

CAFE Enfield is a rewarding place to work. On any day of the week I can look around our space, be it the office, family room or crèche, and there are wonderful examples of learning and connections happening everywhere. Children sharing books with their parents, parents learning to play with their children and developing trusting relationships with workers on-site, are all indicators of a positive learning environment.

Parents' increased knowledge of the value of developing strong relationships with their children is evident in their behaviour. Quite recently, for example, a family, Karen and her son Andrew, dropped in to see us. They have been participating in CAFE Enfield for fourteen months. Andrew was two years old when we first met him. During that time Karen had severe emotional issues and regularly suffered from anxiety attacks. Their relationship, then, was intense because Karen was often stressed and angry. Andrew commonly displayed similar behaviours. Yet through spending time at CAFE and gaining the appropriate support, Karen has been able to get in touch with her strengths. She has learnt new ways to communicate with her son, and consequently, their relationship has improved, as have relationships with others around them. Not so long ago, I saw them at CAFE, reading a book together. Andrew was sitting on Karen's lap, stroking her face with one hand and helping her turn the page with the other. His sense of trust and comfort has improved and he is more confident to try new things.

Children and Families Everywhere Enfield offers young children and their families a sense of belonging, whilst at the same time, giving the opportunity to increase skills and develop strong and healthy relationships with others.

Leah De Zen

Enfield Primary School, South Australia